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AUTHOR Edelson, Paul J.
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ABSTRACT

In the 10 years of its existence (1951-61), the Ford Foundation's Fund for Adult Education (FAE) expended over $47 million on behalf of adult and continuing education. The FAE supported organizations with similar objectives and created its own unique institutions to establish liberal adult education on a nationwide basis. The Test Cities Project was the foundation's first major experiment in urban redesign. Programs were organized in small groups to facilitate face-to-face discussion. FAE grant recipients and Test Cities councils developed courses and discussion programs. As area colleges took over councils unable to survive as independent entities without FAE support, the foundation recognized higher education's potential contribution to liberal continuing education. FAE moved beyond Test Cities with a new concept for university-based Test Centers for further experimentation in developing and marketing liberal adult education programs. The FAE experimented with Demonstration Centers, which were direct grants to some colleges to expand their adult education programs. Through this progression, the FAE firmly established the principle that noncredit liberal adult education could and should pay for itself, thereby locating it as a tuition-supported educational product in higher education. The FAE sacrificed the concept of liberal adult education as peer-led, small-size discussion groups. Adult education became the most overtly market-driven segment of all U.S. education. (YLB)

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SOCRATES ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE: THE FORD FOUNDATION'S MASS MARKETING OF LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION

Paul J. Edelson,
State University of New York at Stony Brook

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SOCRATES ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE: THE FORD FOUNDATION'S MASS MARKETING OF LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION

Paul J. Edelson
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Background

In the ten years of its existence (1951-1961) the Ford Foundation's Fund for Adult Education (FAE) expended over $47 million dollars on behalf of adult and continuing education. This dwarfed the $8.5 million spent by the Carnegie Corporation during the period 1924-1958.[1] In fact, it is a significantly large proportion of the $76 million of the total adult education support spent by foundations in the "modern era" referred to by Knowles in 1962.[2]

The Ford Foundation, by virtue of its enormous wealth, estimated at $417 million in 1951, had the power and, concomitantly, the prestige as America's largest philanthropy to do what it wanted in the area of adult education.[3] Through the FAE it supported the fledgling

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[1]Malcolm Knowles, A History of the Adult Education Movement in the United States, rev. ed. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 1977), 95.

[2]Ibid., 97.

[3]Francis X. Sutton, "The Ford Foundation: The Early Years," Daedalus, Vol. 116, no.4 (1987), 52.

Adult Education Association of the USA (AEA/USA), also founded in 1951, and its publication Adult Leadership as a way of forging coherence in what it perceived as a chaotic, directionless field.[4] It supported the National Association of Public School Adult Educators (NAPSAE) in their efforts to persuade state departments of education to elevate adult education to a level comparable to elementary and secondary education.[5]

In areas where it did not identify or acknowledge organizations willing to carry on the work it deemed necessary, the FAE created its own unique institutions. These were the circumstances surrounding the beginnings of the Test Cities Project, the Test Centers, and the Experimental Discussion Project, all pioneering efforts to firmly establish liberal adult education on a nationwide basis in post World War II America.

In the case of the Test Cities Project, the FAE created, with local citizen participation, adult education councils in twelve medium-size American

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[4]Franklin A. Lindsay, "Memo to Dyke Brown," 17 March 1954, Ford Foundation Archives (FFA), McPeak Office Files, Box 6, Folder 175. See also FAE, The Challenge of Lifetime Learning, (Pasadena, CA: [1954]), 25.

[5]Paul J. Edelson, "The Saturation Project and NAPSAE's Changing Strategies for Adult Education," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, Montreal, Quebec, 15-18 October 1991.

cities ranging in population from 60,000 (York, PA.) to 450,000 (Kansas City, MO.). It funded the councils which were expected to implement and administer, and if possible create, liberal adult education programs, the major area of emphasis for the FAE.[6] These councils were not intended to be simply coordinating bodies bringing together a panoply of other adult providers. The Ford Foundation and the FAE wished to go a step further than the local councils funded by the Carnegie Corporation (and sometimes referred to as "Carnegie Councils") through the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) which were viewed as "elusive and volatile".[7]

Liberal Adult Education in the Post-War Period

By continuing liberal education the FAE meant more than the great classics of Western civilization that constituted the backbone of the Great Books program (also generously supported through major grants to the Great Books Foundation). The FAE defined liberal education broadly so that it might assist adults to intelligently participate as "mature, wise, and

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[6]FAE, "Statement of Purposes and Principles, " June 1952, FFA, FAE Administrative Office Files, Box 11, Folder 94.

[7]Knowles, 178.

responsible citizens" in a free society.[8] Liberal arts and a liberal approach to education were thus fused, for example, with curricula on economics, government, and world events to promote individual development and citizenship that would strengthen both democracy and American society. Continuing liberal education was perceived as the most significant form of education, beginning where formal schooling left off and lasting a lifetime.[9] This took place within the context of an exceedingly confusing post War world.

In a perplexing twist of fate, America had finally come out of a wrenching depression, endured a long and costly war, emerging triumphant to an uneasy peace, but was now beset by nuclear armed enemies that had recently been allies. Democracy/capitalism was now pitted against totalitarianism/socialism in a Cold War where once again the survival of the West was perceived to be up for grabs.

Additionally, the memory of the depression as a painful period of uncertainty and doubt was still so vivid to most adults leading to a quite palpable fear that it

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[8]FAE, Ten Year Report of the Fund for Adult Education (n.p. [1962]), 12.

[9]Ford Foundation, Report of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program (Detroit: 1949), 40-41.

might happen again.[10] Prosperity and the "American high" were not yet an established fact.[11]

The Foundation's Agenda

A priority of the Ford Foundation was thus to strengthen democracy worldwide, but particularly in the United States. A major leitmotif in the Foundation's first major report, "Report of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program" was to bring about a world order where we, as a nation, could be safe and prosperous, resisting totalitarianism and the tide of Communism "mounting" in Asia in Europe.[12]

The meaning of democracy was to be found in practice, the Report maintained, in daily application, not in a set of "rigid rules."[13] America would prevail, not through war which was too and costly and destructive, but by virtue of the example we could set for the rest of the world.

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[10](Goldman, 1960)

[11]See William L. O'Neill, American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945- 1960 (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

[12]Ford Foundation, 26. This study is also called the Gaither Report after Rowan Gaither who chaired the committee that produced it. He would later become President of the Ford Foundation following the resignation of Paul Hoffman.

[13]Ibid., 21.

The Report, noting tendencies towards public apathy and skepticism, called for community demonstration projects to enhance confidence in civic life. The example of innovations in public health policy following successful demonstration projects was offered as a model for what the applied social sciences might also accomplish in the urban arena, thus creating the idea for Test Cities that would be elaborated in subsequent passages of the document.

"Such experiments," the Report continued, "while sometimes difficult and expensive, are often catalytic in effect, producing widespread emulation. The Foundation may find it necessary to support such demonstration projects."[14] In order to combat public apathy, for example, it was suggested that a community might run a "community workshop" in which "scientists or educators act as social engineers, in communities of manageable size, to stimulate an interest in public affairs."[15] After this intervention the extent to which apathy is reduced could be measured and the experiment, perhaps modified, could then be tried in other communities to similar effect.

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[14]Ibid, 68.

[15]Ibid.

In this manner both a raison d'etre as well as a format was established for the Test Cities Project, the Ford Foundation's first major experiment in urban redesign.

The Test Cities Experiment

In 1951 when Paul G. Hoffman former President of the Studebaker Corporation and Director of the Marshall Plan was made President of the Ford Foundation (1951-1953) his first senior level appointment was of Robert Maynard Hutchins to Associate Director (1951-1954). Hutchins, for many the "enfant terrible" of American higher education, had been President and then Chancellor at the University of Chicago since 1929.[16] Probably best known by the general public for canceling the school's varsity intercollegiate football program, he introduced many other controversial changes at Chicago including eliminating compulsory class attendance, awarding bachelor's degrees to students who elsewhere would be considered sophomores, and abolishing more than three hundred courses.[17] Railing against both the vocationalism, materialism, and pragmatism rife in American higher education Hutchins

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[16]Sutton, 55.

[17]Thomas C. Reeves, Freedom and the Foundation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 11.

championed a return to a more traditional and Scholastic form of education.

Before coming to Chicago he had held a number of positions at Yale, including Dean of the Law School, and had met Mortimer Adler, then a psychologist at Columbia. Through his association with Adler, Hutchins was introduced to a theory of education based upon the classics of Western civilization, the "Great Books" which he was to make the core curriculum of the College at the University of Chicago.[18]

At the Ford Foundation, where Hutchins was instrumental in creating both the Fund for the Advancement of Education and the Fund for Adult Education (the former to address formal, traditional education) he was freed from the restraints of an often recalcitrant and hostile faculty (as well as alumni) who resisted his educational innovations.

In his book The Conflict in Education in a Democratic Society (1953) Hutchins makes the case for adult liberal education as a way to improve society through

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[18]See Harry S. Ashmore, Unseasonable Truths: The Life of Robert Maynard Hutchins (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1989) and Edward Shils, "Robert Maynard Hutchins," The American Scholar 59 (Spring, 1990): 211-235.

the intellectual development of citizens.[19] Though he did not see education as an "engine" for social reform[20] in the mechanistic way it is portrayed in the Gaither Report, he nonetheless viewed it as essential in order to reach an "unlimited republic of learning" , an ideal, but attainable social condition.[21] Test Cities were a way of making focused educational materials addressing political issues close to Hutchins, especially on fundamental issues of personal freedom and social responsibilities.

C. Scott Fletcher was made President of the FAE and had the direct responsibility for developing the Test Cities Project. He had been associated previously with both Hoffman and Hutchins, respectively, through former positions he held as Vice-President for Sales with the Studebaker Corporation and as President of Britannica Films. Fletcher was known as a salesman par excellence who had the ability to motivate others to achieve difficult goals.[22] He also had community level

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[19]Robert M. Hutchins, The Conflict in Education in a Free Society (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953).

[20]Ibid., 53.

[21]Ibid, 76.

[22]Robert J. Blakely , former Vice President for the FAE, reported that Fletcher had once brought elephants and other circus animals to a Studebaker dealers sales convention in order to get them "fired up" about selling. Interview by author,

experience as Director of the Field Development Division of the Committee for Economic Development for which he organized many discussion groups during the period 1942-44.[23]

In the Test Cities, programs were to be organized in small groups to facilitate face-to-face discussion, another expression of the anti-establishment bias of Hutchins and Adler who believed that liberal studies materials could be accessed directly without the intervention of professional academics in traditional classroom situations. This method had been tried with success in the Great Books discussion programs Hutchins and Adler had started at the University of Chicago.

Two fundamental problems with the approach of widespread discussion groups that were perceived initially by the FAE when it began to implement Test Cities were the "inadequate" liberal adult education study materials for adults and then, subsequently, the need to train skillful lay discussion leaders.[24] It

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Chicago, IL, 18 October 1991.

[23]See Robert J. Blakely, "Cyril Scott Fletcher" in International Biography of Adult Education (Derby, England: Saxon Printing Ltd., 1985), 173.

[24]Ralph W. Tyler, "Impressions of the Present Program of the Fund for Adult Education," 6 October 1952, FFA, FAE Administrative Office Files, Box 12, Folder 110.

was essential to surmount these hurdles in order to make it possible for the adult education Test City councils to be more than coordinating or advisory bodies.

Some courses and discussion programs were developed specifically for the Test Cities market by other FAE grant recipients including the Great Books Foundation, the American Foundation for Continuing Education, the American Library Association, and the American Foreign Policy Association. The Fund's own Experimental Discussion Project, which contracted directly with individual writers, to produce the study discussion programs was also a source of programs.

The Test Cities councils were also encouraged to create and then offer their own programs including workshops for discussion leaders. It was intended that each council would be operated autonomously by its board, though coordinated by the FAE, and would find a way to become financially viable during the three year term of the grant (1951-1954).

The overall purpose of the Test Cities Program was to see if and how liberal continuing education could become integral to the life of a community. Central to

the experiment was whether the programs could continue to exist once Ford funding was withdrawn. To gradually wean the councils away from foundation support the grants were tapered each succeeding year. It was anticipated that this would provide sufficient incentive for them to raise a larger proportion of their own income from program fees.[25]

The inability of most of the community education councils to survive as "independent" entities without foundation support was a major disappointment and "finding" of the Test Cities Project.

A number of the councils were taken over by area colleges and continued to function under those auspices. The FAE quickly realized as the Test Cities succumbed to insolvency that higher education institutions furnished the most felicitous operational base for liberal adult education. They had the physical plant, administrative personnel, and in many cases a history of community involvement, and experience in

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[25]Robert J. Blakely, with the benefit of hindsight, suggested that it might have made more sense to increase rather than decrease funding allocations each year as a way of helping the programs quickly expand and reach the "take-off" stage required for budgetary self-sufficiency. Instead, by decreasing the allocations the FAE compelled the Councils to devote more time to fund-raising than program development, impeding enlargement of the program base. Interview with author, Chicago, IL, 19 October 1991.

dealing with adults through evening and extension divisions. Most importantly, the Foundation recognized that these established institutions had the "prestige and authority to command the respect of adults seriously concerned about continuing liberal education".[26]

In recognition of the importance of higher education's potential contribution to liberal continuing education the Fund supported a proposal from the Association of University Evening Colleges (AUEC) to create a Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults and thereby stimulated innovation in liberal studies course development.[27]

"Test" and "Demonstration" Centers

The FAE also moved beyond Test Cities with a new concept for university based Test Centers for further experimentation in developing and marketing liberal adult education programs.[28] A total of eight centers

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[26]FAE, Ten Year Report, 45.

[27]John Whipple, "Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults: A History," March 1967, George Arents Research Library ar Syracuse University (GARLSU), Paul Sheats Collection, Box 11, Folder: Organization Records CSLEA- History.

[28]FAE, Ten Year Report.

were created at American higher education institutions. There were three additional centers- at the Pasadena Liberal Arts Center and at the University of British Columbia; the University of Utah was to use the materials on a statewide basis. These were to be coordinated by the FAE in a manner similar to Test Cities, but this time the grants were for a tapering four year period. Once again, it was hoped that fees derived from course registrations would make up the difference between actual costs to the campuses and the FAE funds. At end of four year period the fund anticipated that the colleges would assume full responsibility for the programs including any deficits. The Test Centers experiment ran from 1955-1959.

A major difference between Test Cities and Test Centers was the extensive involvement of a high powered Madison Ave. marketing firm, B. L. Mazel, Inc., to centrally direct promotional advertising. Mazel developed a promotion handbook to be used by all Test Center directors, produced promotional brochures (150,000 in 1957), planned and conducted direct mail tests to determine the effectiveness of varying types of mailing lists, conducted local workshops on advertising, prepared newspaper ads to be used by the Centers, and aided them in conducting their individual promotion

campaigns.[29]

Both the Test Cities and Test Centers projects represented a relentless and purposeful drive by the FAE to determine and identify the correct combination of product (adult liberal education), packaging (study-discussion groups), and promotion (modern advertising) at the right price (tuition) for the correct market (middle class adults). It was in the Test Centers that the nature of the audience became more clear- a high proportion with some college experience, drawn from middle or higher income brackets, with professional and managerial occupations, a slightly greater majority of females, families that were "well-settled' in their communities, and people active in civic and professional affairs.[30]

The delivery of the commodity/service was to be under the control of an appropriate dealership- now presumed to be colleges and universities after the failure of the Test Cities Project to create viable independent adult education councils.

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[29]FAE, "Excerpts from Docket for Board of Directors Meeting," 29 October 1957, FFA, FAE Administrative Office Files, Box 11, Folder 94.

[30] FAE, Ten Year Report, 51.

The genius of American organization and production that led to the creation of large-scale modern American industry documented by Chandler was now being applied to adult education.[31] The FAE, much like large manufacturing concerns, successfully integrated the mass production of study materials from its grantees and the Experimental Discussion Program with mass distribution through the Test Centers, and after 1959 through other outlets. This "vertical integration" lent itself to mass advertising techniques which had been originally designed to broadly market other consumer goods.

Fletcher, the former Studebaker salesman, brought together the dynamics of modern business and the ideal of lifelong learning.[32] The success of this approach was evident to the Fund which proudly proclaimed that Test Centers study-discussion programs had enrolled 10,000 people in 1957-58.[33] In using this yardstick for success, the FAE had completely abandoned the language of social reform and experimentation used in the Gaither report to describe the goals of what was to

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[31]Alfred D. Chandler, The Visible Hand. The managerial revolution in American business. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977).

[32]Blakely, 172-174.

[33]FAE, Ten Year Report, 34.

become the Test Cities Project.

Despite the fact that the FAE gave grants to the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., the National Association of Public School Adult Educators, the Center for the Study of Liberal Education of Adults, and the National Education Association it sought very limited advice from those quarters on its own direct involvement in adult education through Test Cities and Test Centers. Instead, former automobile executives, newspapermen, lawyers, Madison Avenue ad-men, and foundation operatives, who were all more "bottom-line" oriented, and traditional academics who lacked a frame of reference for continuing education finally succeeded in creating through the Test Centers an educational product in an attractive program format, which the American adult consumer would buy. Socrates had been moved from the Academy in Athens to a Detroit-like assembly line and was churning out liberal adult education courses. Evidently these were compatible with the educational demands of a past faced society which had insufficient time for the attenuated discursive approach to adult education found in the "Dialogues."

Concurrent with Test Centers, the FAE experimented with Demonstration Centers which were direct grants to some

colleges to expand their nascent adult education programs. This "final phase" of its effort to advance liberal education was launched in 1956 when the lessons from Test Centers were already becoming evident.[34] Sixteen universities were involved in this project and received grants. These were followed in 1960 and 1961 by long-term grants to selected colleges which were encouraged to make adult liberal education a permanent part of their continuing education programs.
Since the emphasis was now on program viability and the experiment more decentralized, and under local control, than in either Test Cities or Test Centers, the schools could veer away from study-discussion formats to larger lecture classes that could be more financially remunerative.

Adult Education and the Marketplace

Through this progression the FAE firmly established the principle that non-credit liberal adult education could and, therefore, should pay for itself thereby locating it as a tuition supported educational product in American higher education. American university extension had been marching down this road for some time. A study by Morton, that had been financed by the

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[34]Ibid., 52.

FAE, recorded that over a twenty-one year period (1930-1951) there had been a tendency for university extension programs to become self-supporting to a higher degree than other university programs.[35]

Morton viewed this trend as a "problem area".[36] He preferred a development for general university extension similar to that of agricultural extension in which foundation support had led to government support once the value of these programs had been demonstrated to the public.

This principle of having to pay its own way is the single most distinguishing feature of American continuing education today. The success of the model has driven out all serious alternatives to the extent that with the limited exceptions of grant supported programs for the disadvantaged and other targeted groups including veterans, adult education is the most blatantly market driven segment of all American education.

The FAE triumphed in this approach by sacrificing the

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[35]John R. Morton, University Extension in the United States (Birmingham, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1953).

[36]Ibid, 104.

most salient feature of liberal adult education as conceived of initially by Hutchins and Adler who envisioned peer led, small-size discussion groups as the embodiment of true adult learning. This was to be the driving force behind the Test Cities which would galvanize civic spirit and community cohesion in those communities where they were located.

Conversely, the larger number of discussion groups in Test Centers and the huge lecture classes that were ultimately popularized through the Demonstration Centers allowed for greater economies of scale, and consequently higher revenues, than were possible in smaller classes. This approach was much more attractive to university administrators, including those directly involved in adult education, who were searching for a rationale to support and also gain support for continuing education.[37]

The story of the FAE and its iterations of adult liberal education is thus important to those who wish to understand the present-day fixations and priorities of mainstream American continuing education, particularly that which is university based. In addition, the elevated and exalted place of higher

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[37]See Whipple.

education in the entire pantheon of American education makes the higher education model attractive to continuing education providers in most all other sectors as well such as in public schools and non-profit organizations.

The need to fill large classes has led to the popularization of adult liberal education as a form of broad based intellectual entertainment, a resurrection, in spirit, of the traveling Commercial Chautauqua Circuit which brought "entertainment and culture" to rural America, but now as an established part of university and, in some cases, public school continuing education.[38] Moreover, a type of adult education Gresham's Law can now be identified in which fee supported programs that generate greater revenue ultimately drive out those which generate less.

Looking back, one may wish that had the Ford experiment in its original format of the Test Cities succeeded in improving community life in ways that could be convincingly documented it could have paved the way for increased government support of liberal adult education

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[38]Knowles, 38.

diminishing its reliance upon fees.[39] But the Test Cities Project foundered on the shoals of vagueness and could never demonstrate tangible outcomes as palpably as agricultural extension. The FAE simply could not prove, by the yardsticks it selected, that liberal adult education made for a better life. Instead there was a "drift" or migration in the experiment until a measure for success was identified that could be met. For Scott Fletcher and the FAE, a series of test marketing experiments in adult education were conducted until the right combination of factors could be found. One model that had proved itself in the mass production and distribution of consumer goods was superimposed onto another commodity-adult education.

Postscript

The Fund's obsession with securing economic viability for liberal adult education led it to lose sight of what might actually be accomplished in community continuing education. Ironically at a later period in the Ford Foundation's history the Foundation resurrected the principle of urban demonstration

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[39]See Edelson for a discussion of NAPSAE's "Saturation Project" which was intended to demonstrate the impact of adult education on a community as a way of leveraging political support.

projects, that was intrinsic to Test Cities, in the Gray Areas Project, an urban development program that it supported in New Haven, CT.[40] This, in turn, became the template for Model Cities- probably the most ambitious project for urban reform ever attempted in the United States. In that way the spirit of Test Cities was revived, but without the liberal education core. Perhaps the goals of social renewal through liberal education are unattainable. However, it can be reasonably argued through an examination of the FAE and its innovative projects that the liberal studies concept was never given a fair chance to succeed.

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[40]See Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land. The great black migration and how it changed America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).